

The Construction and Design of a Wicker Furniture Set from the Collection of the Castle Museum in Łańcut as a Criterion for Identification

ANNA RÓŻAŃSKA, IRENA SWACZYNA

Department of Construction and Technology of Final Wood Products, Faculty of Wood Technology Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW

Abstract: *The Construction and Design of a Wicker Furniture Set from the Collection of the Castle Museum in Łańcut as a Criterion for Identification.* In the article, a furniture set in the *chinoiserie* style exhibited in the Chinese Apartment of the Castle Museum in Łańcut was described. The construction features and the design of the armchairs was analysed. These aspects indicate English origin of the furniture before 1800.

Keywords: *chinoiserie*, bamboo furniture, à la bamboo, English Regency furniture, furniture construction

ORIGIN OF THE FURNITURE

The set of painted furniture à la bamboo from the Chinese Apartment from the Castle Museum in Łańcut comprises nine exhibited armchairs with the inventory numbers from S 2322 to 2324 MŁ, from S 2313 to 3216 MŁ, and from S 2441 to 2442 MŁ (Różańska 2009).

The Chinese Apartment (fig.1) – just as Izabela Lubomirska's other concepts – constitutes the realization of a well thought-out intellectual, aesthetic and functional programme. It can be compared with other apartments of that type: the Chinese Rooms from Wilanów. The common features are as follows: the time of origin (beginning of the 19th century), family relations of the originators, and the fact that the interiors have the character of a (private or public) exhibition. The Apartment, completed about 1800, was based on a romantic English version of *chinoiserie*, more ancient and exotic than Chinese in character (Kossakowska-Szanajca, Majewska-Maszkowska 1964).



Fig.1. Izabela Lubomirska's Chinese Apartment in Łańcut, Chinese Bedroom

THE CONSTRUCTION AND DESIGN OF THE FURNITURE

The armchairs are made of beech wood using the technique of turning and bending; the construction uses rails (fig.2). The armchairs are totally covered with a non-transparent brownish-green paint with white and ochre stripes, which makes the structure of wood completely invisible. The seats are diagonally woven of raffia fibres, with the pattern resembling that of an envelope. From the top, the weave is painted in black stripes which form an interesting geometric pattern. Each armchair has four turned legs. The back legs, which are made from the same piece of wood as the back rest, are slightly curved in the middle and bent out. The bend point is on the top edge of the rail. A distorted diameter of the back legs in the place of the bend may be evidence of the bending technique used. Trapezium seats are wider at the front and slightly protuberant at the sides. The legs are joined at the bottom with turned stretchers: the front one (placed a little higher), the side ones, and the back one. The armchairs have openwork armrests and the back rest, filled with interspaced turned thin pieces of wood. In the places where the front legs join the rail, there are cubes. The rail construction consists of the front rail, the back rail, and the side rails fixed horizontally, which also constitute the construction of the frame on which the seat is woven.

To join the stretchers with the legs, the horizontal elements of the back rest with the back legs, the thin pieces of wood from the back rest with the horizontal elements of the back rest, and the frame of the armrests with the back legs and with the thin pieces of wood from the armrests, turned tenons were used, whose diameter was 2-4 mm smaller than the diameter of the elements. It has been impossible to determine the type of joint between the cubes at the top of the front legs and the rail, most probably, however, it is the mortise and tenon joint. The joint between the armrests and the side rail is very interesting. The armrest supports go through the side rails, cut out in these places (fig.3B). In the bottom part of the armrest supports one can see marks left after round cover dowels used to hide the screws (fig. 3A). These cover dowels are 15 mm in diameter.

In the construction of the wooden armchairs features typical of bamboo furniture are used. In the places of joints, thicker parts imitating metal fittings (characteristic of bamboo furniture) are turned or painted. In both cases, they are underlined by the use of white colour with ochre bands. The back legs end in flattened spherical shapes, turned from the same piece of wood, and painted ochre (the colour of wood), which imitates finials (they performed the role of bungs) fixed onto the endings of rods in bamboo furniture.

The sizes of the armchairs differ. The height varies from 867 to 872 mm, the width – 537-574 mm, the depth – 475-490 mm, the height of the seats – 430 mm. They are comfortable. The seats are wide (545 x 435 mm) and slightly lower at the front of the chair (to 10 mm), and the back legs are bent, which ensures comfort and stability. The armchairs are elegant, designed in a refined way, with the construction using turned elements of various diameters. The set is done correctly as far as its technical aspect is concerned.

CONSTRUCTION AND FURNITURE DESIGN ANALYSIS

The time of origin of the Łańcut furniture is specified in the *Castle Inventory* from 1802 and 1805 (Inwentarz Zamku Łańcuckiego 1802-1805), in which the furniture set is mentioned as the original furnishings of the Chinese Apartment of Izabela Lubomirska. The set must have been made before ca. 1800. Bearing in mind the Princess's numerous trips, and the novel character of the Apartment in Poland, one can assume that its furnishings were specially ordered from French or English *ébénistes*, shortly before the Apartment was finished.

The Łańcut set belongs to the group of objects called *chinoiserie*. They freely imitated the character and ornamentation of oriental furniture. In fact, they were eclectic, they

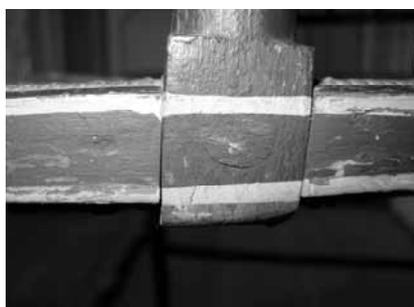
combined motifs taken from Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Persian, or other eastern art, with European furniture tradition, designed for a European user, which is why the characteristic forms of the pieces of furniture differ from the Chinese models. Its style, however, differs from the forms identified with Chinese art, even considering the European perspective. It has only one common feature with the art of the Far East, namely the fact of imitating bamboo furniture, which is customarily identified with Chinese art, just as lacquerware is identified with Chinese or Japanese art. The style of the armchairs refers directly to Ancient Egyptian patterns, both in the form and in the finish of the surface. Egyptian furniture was mainly veneered, inlay was used, it was plated, gilded, or – as in the case of the Łańcut set – painted. In the Chinese Apartment, there was also a wooden stool, inv. no.: S. 5900 (today in the Pompeian Salon), whose form constitutes a faithful imitation of the form of Egyptian stools. Combining Chinese, Japanese, Roman, Greek, Egyptian, or even Assyrian motifs is typical of the furnishings of 18th-century English interiors. This trend intensified in the Regency era (Edwards 1951,1955,1964). The Łańcut set seems to belong to this kind of furniture. Its painting decoration is executed in brownish-green paint, and has white stripes which form a narrow frame, highly popular in England of that time. Construction features: the way of fixing the armrest supports (going into the side rails- fig.3B), and the way of concealing screw joints of the armrest supports (by means of cover dowels- fig.3A), can also be seen in English Chippendale armchairs from the Łańcut Castle Museum collection (inv. no.: PMŁ2086 and S1055MŁ). This attribution is not disproved by features of the material and the type of the wickering (woven diagonally, resembling the pattern of an envelope), which also indicate England. The remaining construction features, e.g. the turned round-section tenons (not much smaller than the diameter of the elements), rather testify to technological simplifications than determine the environment. The features of the style and of the construction point to England from the Regency period as to the place and time of origin respectively. This is not contradicted by the entry from the Castle inventory from 1854-1855: “four English chairs painted grey and white” (Inwentarz Zamku Łańcuckiego 1854-1855).

CONCLUSIONS

1. The construction features and the design of the Łańcut set give grounds for the specification of the time and place of its origin.
2. The time of origin of the Łańcut furniture set is defined as “before 1800” in the Castle Inventory from 1802 and 1805.
3. Another Inventory from the years 1854-1855 mentions the set as English. However, it is not enough to assume that the set is of English origin. The term “English furniture” was often used in Poland to refer to a type of Chinese-style furniture. What is more important is the fact that the construction solutions used in the set are analogous to those used in furniture of unquestionably English origin.
4. On the basis of the way of fixing the armrest supports to the side rails (in mortises in the rails), and strengthening the joint with screws with characteristic cover dowels, the set from the Chinese Apartment can be considered to have been made in England.
5. The material used and the type of the weave (resembling the pattern of an envelope) point to England as to the place of origin of the pieces of furniture.
6. The set is styled on Egyptian furniture, fashionable in England during the Regency.
7. The pieces of furniture are completely covered with painting decoration, and the rails are decorated with a motif of white stripes known from many English Regency pieces of furniture.



Fig.2. Wicker armchair from the Chinese Apartment in Łańcut



A



B

Fig.3. Wicker armchair from the Chinese Apartment in Łańcut: A – the way in which the armrest support is fixed to the side rail, the cover dowel visible; B – the joint between the rail and the armrest support, seen from the bottom of the seat

REFERENCES

1. EDWARDS R., 1951: A History of the English Chair, London.
2. EDWARDS R., 1955: English Taste in the Eighteenth Century from Baroque to Neo-Classic, [exhibition catalogue, the Royal Academy of Art], London.
3. EDWARDS R., 1964: The Shorter Dictionary of English Furniture, London.
4. Inwentarz Zamku Łańcuckiego 1802-1805, Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych [Central Archives of Historical Records] – Zespół APK z Łańcuta, Sygn. 784, AGAD.APL.784.

5. Inwentarz Zamku Łańcuckiego w r. 1854 i 1855 spisywany, Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych w Warszawie [Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw], Zespół Archiwum Potockich, Sygn.785 Inwentarz Zamku 1854-55 AGAD.APŁ.785, p.38.
6. KOSSAKOWSKA-SZANAJCA Z., MAJEWSKA-MASZKOWSKA B., 1964: Zamek w Łańcucie, Warsaw, 240-248.
7. RÓŻAŃSKA A., 2009: Charakterystyka oraz konserwacja i restauracja wybranych mebli w typie chinoiserie z historycznej kolekcji Muzeum Pałac w Wilanowie [Characterization, conservation, and restoration of selected pieces of furniture in the chinoiserie style from the historical collection of the Wilanów Palace Museum], master's thesis, thesis advisor: Professor Irena Swaczyna, Faculty of Wood Technology of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences, specialization: Antique Wood Conservation, Warsaw.

Streszczenie: *Konstrukcja i wzornictwo kompletu mebli wyplatanych ze zbiorów Muzeum Zamek w Łańcucie jako kryterium identyfikacji.* W artykule opisano komplet mebli w stylu *chinoiserie*, znajdujący się w Apartamencie Chińskim Muzeum Zamek w Łańcucie. Analizowano cechy konstrukcji i wzornictwo foteli. Na podstawie sposobu mocowania podpory poręczy podłokietnika do oskrzyń bocznych (wpuszczenie w wycięcie w oskrzyni) oraz jego wzmocnienie wkrętami z charakterystycznymi kołkami maskującymi, komplet uznano za wyrób angielski. Także zastosowany materiał i kopertowy wzór wyplotu jest typowy dla Anglii. Komplet stylizowany jest na meble egipskie, modne w Anglii w okresie Regencji. Meble pokryte są w całości dekoracją malarską a oskrzynie i kostki nóg dekorowane są motywem białych ramek widocznych na wielu meblach angielskich z okresu Regencji. Cechy te wskazują na angielskie pochodzenie mebli z przed roku 1800.

Corresponding authors:

Anna Różańska
Irena Swaczyna
Faculty of Wood Technology,
Department of Construction and Technology of Final Wood Products,
166 Nowoursynowska str.,
02-787 Warsaw,
Poland
e-mail: annamaria.rozanska@gmail.com
e-mail: irena_swaczyna@sggw.pl